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Hopewell woman receives Governor's Caregiver Recognition Award
Love and dedication keep her caring for others

Richmond, VA — Despite her own health problems, Barbara Matheny of Hopewell focuses her energy on caring for others. When surgery left her daughter unable to care for herself or her children, Matheny took on the role of sole caregiver for the family. She moved in with her daughter and four young grandchildren to voluntarily provide much-needed care.

Matheny is one of only nine people throughout the Commonwealth to receive the Governor's Volunteer Caregiver Recognition Award. The annual awards program, in its second year, is sponsored by the Virginia Council on the Status of Women. Matheny and the other eight recipients were honored on Feb. 21. Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Commissioner Anthony Conyers, Jr., members of the Virginia General Assembly and representatives from the Virginia Council on the Status of Women attended the ceremony to honor this year's recipients and the more than one million unpaid caregivers within Virginia.

"The Caregiver Award symbolically honors the thousands of Virginia caregivers who lovingly take care of family and friends day-after-day. Although the award is only given to a few caregivers, it serves as a reminder of the tremendous contributions all caregivers within the Commonwealth make," Conyers said.

Matheny continues to care for her daughter and grandchildren while tending to a severely diabetic husband and battling her own medical issues. She perseveres to give the proper attention to every aspect of her daughter's care, even awakening regularly each night to turn her daughter to prevent bedsores.

Barbara Matheny's care of her family is part of a growing trend across the country and the Commonwealth. Virginia ranks 12th in the nation in the number of family caregivers, with a total of nearly 700,000 people caring for relatives.

In addition to Matheny, this year's recipients included:

- Jean Beckett of Virginia Beach, who has been a caregiver since 1980, assisting her mother, father, grandmother and adult stepdaughter

- Carolyn Seward of Richmond, who put her career aside to aid seven young family members, including two who have developmental disabilities
- Valerie Logan of Richmond, who for 17 years, has been the sole caregiver of her daughter, who was born prematurely at just 29 weeks, weighing only two pounds
- Loretta Stapleton of Big Stone Gap, who provides round-the-clock care for her mother, who is battling Alzheimer's Disease
- Henry Tyson of Hampton, who, at nearly 90, has provided full-time care for his ailing wife for the last seven years, allowing her to stay at home, as opposed to a nursing home
- Karen Cockrell of Front Royal, who has provided care for dozens of abused, neglected, abandoned and runaway children, as well as those in transition from foster homes or whose family situation does not allow for care by a relative
- Irene Imbrongo of Lynchburg, who provides constant care for her husband in his battle with progressive Alzheimer's Disease
- John Blanks of Richmond, who has become the primary caregiver for his mother and grandmother since his father passed away

Nationally, it is estimated there are more than 44 million volunteer caregivers. The need for such individuals is expected to increase throughout the next 25 years as the population grows and ages. The Governor's Volunteer Caregiver Award recognizes and honors those who lovingly and voluntarily provide care for family and friends and is intended to publicly celebrate their contributions, as well as bring awareness to the issue of volunteer caregiving.

For more information, visit:
http://www.dss.virginia.gov
http://www.dss.virginia.gov/community/council_women/caregiver.html
http://www.dss.virginia.gov/news/2007/pr_caregivers_03-01-2007.pdf
http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/caregiver.html

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Editor's note: Interviews and additional photos available upon request.